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Travel chaos as deadly storm hits northeast US

NEW YORK (AFP) - Heavy snow and strong winds battered the northeastern United States Thursday, intensifying post-Christmas travel woes, after violent weather left at least nine people dead and many without power.

More than 2,750 flights have been cancelled since Tuesday as the huge storm wreaked havoc from the Gulf of Mexico to the Great Lakes before heading for the northeast, including 500 on Thursday, according to flight tracker FlightAware.

In New York, high winds sparked major delays, but only 65 flights were outright cancelled at the three major area airports -- Kennedy, LaGuardia and Newark.

Winter storm warnings were in effect for parts of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and New England, the National Weather Service said. Additional coastal flood warnings were issued from New York's Long Island to Maine.

Continued on pg 6



CMB and Ling & Sons show what the Holiday Spirit is all about!



This is the 15th consecutive year that Caribbean Mercantile Bank N.V. is sharing and giving away to those who are going through some tough times at the end of the year.

Joined by the staff of Ling & Sons, a group of CMB employees prepares and delivers baskets to Aruba's families who need a little extra help. Also families of CMB's employees joined to deliver the baskets at more than 130

households. The baskets contain different first necessity items, but also the basic alimentation items. The bank and Ling & Sons also adds extra gifts to the package, spreading the Christmas feeling of joy and happiness in the homes in different districts of Aruba.

CMB wishes to thank everyone who volunteered, not only their own staff, but also the staff of Ling and Sons, to make this beautiful gesture possible, hereby showing what the real meaning of Christmas is.



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Abbas warns of disbanding PA if no peace talks

JERUSALEM (AFP) - Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas warned Thursday that he will disband his Palestinian Authority if there was no Israeli movement toward renewing peace talks after Israel's elections on January 22.

Abbas, in an interview with the Israeli daily Haaretz, said that if such a situation arises he will hand full responsibility for the occupied West Bank to the Israeli government.

"If there is no progress even after the election I will take the phone and call (Prime Minister Benjamin)

Netanyahu," Abbas said.

"I'll tell him...Sit in the chair here instead of me, take the keys, and you will be responsible for the Palestinian Authority."

"Once the new government in Israel is in place, Netanyahu will have to decide -- yes or no," Abbas said.

Talks between the two sides have been on hold since September 2010, with the Palestinians insisting on a settlement freeze before returning to the negotiating table and the Israelis insisting on no preconditions.

Following last month's

historic United Nations vote giving the Palestinians upgraded status in the world body Israel announced a new spate of settlement-building in the West Bank and Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem.

In Thursday's interview

Abbas said that since then Israel had also reduced security co-ordination with Palestinian forces in the West Bank.

He said that he would be willing to renew negotiations with Netanyahu after the election but would demand

that Israel freeze further settlement construction while they are being held, renew the transfer of Palestinian tax revenues that Israel has been withholding and release some 120 long-term Palestinian prisoners.

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Government's Streetcar project inaugurated amidst jolly crowd!



The past week began with the illumination of the down town mainstreet, which was made accessible to the general public. And, just before Christmas one of the four streetcars to traverse through the down town area was in-

augurated in front of a rather jubilant crowd of onlookers.

The president of the merchants association (MAMBO), Audrey Croes, was especially ecstatic about the inauguration of this first streetcar, she referred to the

occasion as the accomplishment of the government's vision. Croes is one of those who believed in the project for the main street despite the many criticisms from so many others. According to Audrey Croes, "the heart of



Audrey Croes
the mainstreet is beating again."

The new street car ran from the Schelpstraat next to the Museum up to in front of Penha for the inauguration ceremony. It then traversed to almost the end of the mainstreet with a 20 minute stop to let those on board off for some quick shopping. This demonstrated the importance of the streetcar for businesses at the end of the mainstreet.

The president of MAMBO reminded employees working in the mainstreet to park their vehicle on the outskirts

of the city center and to begin making use of the streetcar to get to their jobs. This way they would leave the closer parking areas for those coming to shop in the city center. Croes is convinced that the stores will again begin to make money and that that will compensate for the lost revenue of the past year during the construction phase of the project. She ended her very positive remarks with much praise for the government's vision and welcomed all to unite together for a better future of the mainstreet and for Aruba.



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Clinton still resting at home after illness: aide

WASHINGTON (AFP) - Outgoing US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who fell ill in early December and hasn't been seen in public since, continues to rest at home, her closest aide said Thursday.

Clinton, 65, has been off work sick since her return from her last trip on December 7, although her staff says she has been working from home.

Her lengthy absence from public life has sparked claims from some of her fiercer critics that she is trying to avoid testifying in a congressional investigation into a deadly attack on a US consulate in Libya.

The State Department said Clinton had contracted a bad stomach virus during her five-day stay in Europe. She had to cancel a planned trip to North Africa and Abu Dhabi due to the illness.

A week later Clinton's doctors said she had become severely dehydrated due to the effects of the stomach bug and had fainted, suffering a concussion.

They recommended she rest at home and avoid, through mid-January, the high-intensity travel she had been accustomed to taking as secretary of state.

Clinton has flown almost a million miles since taking office four years ago, visited 112 countries and spent



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Richard van der Wal 13-fold Aruban Sunfish Sailing Champion



Richard van der Wal recently won the Aruban Sunfish Sailing Championship 2012. The

performance was remarkable since Van der Wal won the championship for the 13th

time since 1996. Competition for second and third was fierce with Job Laboyrie becoming second and Peter Prinsen claiming third.

The ranking list 2013 of Sunfish Club was won this year by Richard van der Wal followed by Peter Prinsen (2nd) and Job Laboyrie (3rd).

In addition to the championship, the ranking list also entails other friendly and long distance races. The "wissel-strop", a rotating trophy for newcomers, was awarded this

year to the youth talent Maurice Rooijakkers.

The year 2012 was characterised by growth of the class and regional exchange. In August, a total of 20 Sunfish sailors participated in the Aruba Rembrandt Regatta of which two from Curaçao and one from St.Maarten. In October, five Aruban Sunfish sailors participated in the Bonaire Regatta. At time the Bonaire sailors were invited to participate in the Aruba Rembrandt Regatta 2013.

During a closing dinner at Varadero Yacht Club, the board of Sunfish Club Aruba (SCA) congratulated the winners with their result. At this occasion Richard van der Wal received the "Ernie Kervel rotating trophy".

Due to her great stability the Sunfish is very suitable for Aruba's coastal waters. New members are more than welcome. More information is available on the new Facebook page:

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Travel chaos as deadly storm hits northeast US

Continued from pg 1

(AFP)--So far, the heaviest snowfall was recorded in northern New York, with more than a foot (30 centimeters) on the ground in Rochester on the shores of Lake Ontario.

The storm was expected to continue to move to the northeast, dumping up to another six to 12 inches of snow on northern New York and New England.

"Winter weather has arrived for many parts of the state, so as a precaution we have opened the emergency operation center to coordinate response efforts using all state and local resources," New York governor Andrew Cuomo said.

And New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg used residents still without power two months after deadly super-storm Sandy slammed into the city in October to seek refuge in emergency shelters.

In Canada, dozens of planes were grounded in Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal due to the wintry

weather, with 18 inches of snow expected in the southern part of Quebec province.

Earlier in the week, nearly three dozen tornadoes were reported in the southern US states of Texas, Louisiana, Alabama and Mississippi.

More than 200,000 people lost power in Arkansas, Mississippi and Texas, and Entergy, the regional utility company, warned Wednesday that it could take crews up to a week to restore electricity in all areas.

The governors of both Mississippi and Alabama have declared states of emergency.

In Indiana, authorities dispatched nearly 600 trucks to clear highways and smaller state roads, and advised travelers to stay home if possible or else leave themselves extra time.

The violent storms have so far claimed at least nine lives -- three in Arkansas, two in Oklahoma, two in Indiana and one each in Louisiana and Texas.



(U.S. President Barack Obama steps off the Marine One upon his return to the White House December 27, 2012 in Washington, DC.) President Obama returned to a sharply divided Washington where lawmakers have stubbornly refused to compromise on a plan to avoid the so-called "fiscal cliff." With pressure mounting before hundreds of billions of dollars in higher taxes and spending cuts set in, Democrats and Republicans are essentially treating the crisis as a hot potato, blaming one another for the inaction. He cut his Hawaiian Christmas vacation short to contend with the looming January 1 fiscal cliff deadline, as White House officials reportedly lashed out at the "congressional stupidity" gripping the capital. (AFP photo)

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Putin vows to sign anti-US adoption bill

MOSCOW (AFP) - Russia's President Vladimir Putin vowed on Thursday to sign a bill banning Americans from adopting Russian children that has added new strains to the uneasy relations between the former Cold War foes

An aide separately raised the spectre of the Kremlin eliminating all foreign adoptions as part of a patriotic drive to limit Russia's dependence on others.

The highly contentious bill is widely regarded as the toughest piece of anti-US legislation to reach Putin's desk during his 13-year rule -- a period that saw Moscow engage in repeated squabbles with the West over foreign policy and human rights.

"I do not yet see any reason why I should not sign it," Putin told a meeting of top officials a day after the draft was unanimously approved by the upper house of parliament.

Pro-Kremlin lawmakers put together the draft in a matter of days in response to a new US law sanctioning Russian officials implicated in the 2009 prison death of the whistleblowing attorney Sergei Magnitsky.

In addition, a separate measure targets Russia's liberal activists by banning all domestic political organisations with funding from the

United States.

The two measures' adoption was accompanied by virulently nationalistic rhetoric from lawmakers who accused rich Americans of buying Russian children and then abandoning them to horrible fates.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and the cabinet's social affairs chief Olga Golodets have both spoken out against it.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on Wednesday added its voice of protest by urging Moscow to "let the best interests of children -- and only their best interests -- determine its

actions."

But Putin mounted a firm defence of the measure while accusing the United States of "acting brazenly and arrogantly" toward Russia's point of view.

He said those who believed the law limited the opportunities of orphans failed to see the threats to Russian society posed by a steady outflow of children abroad.

"There are lots of places in the world where living standards are higher than they are here," said Putin.

"And what -- are we going to send all our children there? Perhaps we should move there ourselves?"



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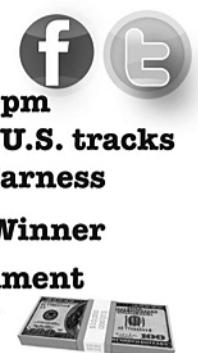
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International News

Russia warns of 'bloody chaos' if Syria talks fail



MOSCOW, Russia (AFP) - Russia on Thursday warned of "bloody chaos" in Syria should peace talks led by UN-Arab League envoy Lakhdar Brahimi fail to end a 21 month conflict that has claimed an estimated 45,000 lives.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said the United States and other players must redouble their efforts amid fading hopes for a political solution to the bloodshed.

Russia remains Syria's most important international ally and is one of the few nations to have unlimited access to President Bashar al-Assad's government.

Lavrov's meeting with the Syrians came as Brahimi wound down several days of talks in Damascus by calling for "real change" and the quick introduction of a transition government "with all powers".

Assad's government has still not responded to Brahimi's call.

But the armed opposition immediately rejected any transition plan that would see either Assad or his immediate cohorts retain their positions of

authority.

It is not immediately clear how Moscow intends to proceed.

A foreign ministry spokesman had earlier rejected reports of a joint Russia-US peace initiative that would see Assad stay in power until 2014 while preventing him from further renewing his mandate.

Brahimi will meet Lavrov in Moscow on Saturday in the hope of convincing Russia to do all it can to make sure that Assad accepts an accord that would gradually ease him from power.

Lavrov did not disclose the full details of his talks with the visiting Syrians.

But he conceded that hopes were fading for a Russian-backed initiative drafted in Geneva in June that made no explicit call on Assad to step down -- an alternative the ruling regime appeared to accept.

Russia has always insisted it was not propping up Assad's regime but only pursuing a defense of international law that rejects foreign intervention in domestic disputes.

LA gunowners hand in weapons after US school shooting

VAN NUYS, (AFP) - Long lines formed Wednesday as Los Angeles gun owners turned in weapons for up to \$200 worth of groceries, in a gun buyback event brought forward after the Connecticut school shooting.

Authorities promised there would be no questions asked at the drive-thru style event, where owners handed over weapons including assault rifles and Uzis directly from their cars, in exchange for grocery store gift cards.

But a couple of pro-gun activists also turned out to protest against the Gun Buy-

back Program organized in traditionally liberal Los Angeles, trying to dissuade owners from giving in weapons to be destroyed.

Lopez said police would check the weapons handed in, to make sure they are not reported as stolen or lost, and hand them back to their rightful owners if they are. All other weapons were due to be melted, he said.

The fact that police were asking no questions was a key incentive. "See that? That's a silencer," said Lopez, pointing an assault weapon. "That's illegal. We didn't say anything."

By the end of the day a total of 1,016 weapons, including 41 rifles, had been handed in in Van Nuys, north of LA, one of two locations where weapons could be turned in. Police even ran out of grocery cards at one point.

Weapons turned in also included TEC-9 semi-automatic handguns, as well as World War II rifles and vintage shotguns, one dating from 1895.

Gun owners were given up to a \$100 grocery store gift card in exchange for handguns, rifles and shotguns, or up to a \$200 card for automatic weapons.

New Year's Eve Celebration

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Health & Living

US childhood obesity dips for first time in decades: study



CHICAGO (AFP) - Obesity rates among small children may finally be on the decline after more than tripling in the United States the past 30 years, a study out indicated.

The study found that obesity rates peaked in 2004 and then declined slightly among low-income children aged two to four who receive benefits from a federal food stamp program called SNAP.

Obesity is most prevalent among minority and low-income families and has been associated with a range of health problems and premature death.

The researchers analyzed data from a pediatric nutrition surveillance system which

monitors almost half of the children eligible for federally funded maternal and child health and nutrition programs.

They were able to access height and weight data from 27.5 million children aged two to four in the 30 states which consistently reported their data.

In 1998, obesity levels were at 13.05 percent of the children. This rose to a peak of 15.36 percent in 2004 before declining to 14.94 percent in 2010.

Extreme obesity rates rose from 1.75 percent in 1998 to a peak of 2.22 percent in 2003 before slipping down to 2.07 percent in 2010, the study published in the Journal of the

American Medical Association found.

In an accompanying editorial, Dr. David Ludwig said the declines seen are not enough, and he urged an overhaul of the federal food stamp program (SNAP) to help low-income families tackle obesity by eliminating junk food and adding more fruit and vegetables to their diet.

While other federal food programs, like the free meals offered in schools, have been revised to focus on healthful eating, SNAP has no regulations to influence the quality of food purchased.

Ludwig noted that it pays for an estimated \$4 billion in soft drinks per year, which adds up to about 20 million servings of soda a day.

More than a third of US children were overweight in 2008, the CDC found in a previous study.

Childhood obesity rates jumped from seven percent of children aged six to 11 in 1980 to 20 percent in 2008. The number of obese teens aged 12 to 19 jumped from five percent to 18 percent over the same period.

Indian teen kills self after pressed to drop rape case

AMRITSAR (AFP) - A 17-year-old Indian girl who was gang-raped committed suicide after police pressured her to drop the case and marry one of her attackers, police and a relative said.

Amid the ongoing uproar over the gang-rape of a student on a bus in New Delhi earlier this month, the latest case has again shone the spotlight on the police's handling of sex crimes.

One police officer has been sacked and another suspended over their conduct after the assault during the festival of Diwali on November 13 in the Patiala region in the Punjab, according to officials.

The teenager was found dead on Wednesday night after swallowing poison.

Inspector General Paramjit Singh Gill said that the teenager had been "running from pillar to post to get her case registered" but officers failed to open a formal inquiry.

Before her death, there had been no arrests over her case although three people were detained on Thursday. Two of them were her alleged male attackers and the third was a suspected woman accomplice.

The victim's sister told In-

dian television that the teenager had been urged to either accept a cash settlement or marry one of her attackers.

"The police started pressuring her to either reach a financial settlement with her attackers or marry one of them," her sister told the NDTV network.

Meanwhile, the Press Trust of India reported that a police officer has been suspended for allegedly refusing to register a rape complaint in the northern state of Chhattisgar.

The woman and her husband later brought the case to the attention of a more senior officer and a hunt has now been launched for her attacker, an auto rickshaw driver.

Official figures show that 228,650 of the total 256,329 violent crimes recorded last year in India were against women.

The real figure is thought to be much higher as so many women are reluctant to report attacks to the police.

During an address to the chief ministers of India's states on Thursday, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh pledged to bring in new laws to cover attacks on women.

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Sci-Tech

US readers turn increasingly to digital books: study



SAN FRANCISCO (AFP) — US readers are increasingly opting for digital books instead of ink-and-paper editions, according to a Pew Research Center study released on Thursday.

The share of US adults reading electronic books rose to 23 percent in November from 16 percent the same time last year, according to the Pew study.

Meanwhile, ranks of people age 16 or older turning to pages of printed books fell to 67 percent from 72 percent, the findings indicated.

Overall, 75 percent of US adults read books in one form or another in a slight slip from the 78 percent figure seen late in 2011, according to the Pew Internet and American Life Project.

The growing popularity of e-books was in step with the hot trend in tablet computers, whether they are dedicated reading devices such as Kindles or Nooks or multi-purpose Internet portals such as Apple iPads or Google Nexus devices.

The portion of US adults with some kind of tablet jumped to 33 percent late this year, as compared with 18 percent as 2011 came to an end, according to the Pew study.

Understandably, the number

of people borrowing e-books from US libraries also rose, findings indicated.

People in higher education and income brackets were more likely to be e-book readers, as were those between the ages of 30 and 49, according to Pew.

The findings were based on a survey taken between October 15 and November 10.

Toyota in \$1.1 bn deal with US owners over recalls

TOKYO (AFP) - Toyota said it had agreed to pay about \$1.1 billion to settle a class action lawsuit launched by US vehicle owners affected by a series of mass recalls from the Japanese automaker.

Toyota did not accept any blame but agreed to compensate owners who argued that the value of about 16.3 million vehicles took a hit from dozens of deadly accidents allegedly caused by Toyota vehicles speeding out of control in 2009.

The deal will cover the cost of installing a free brake override system in about 2.7 million vehicles.

It will also provide cash payments to those who sold their vehicles in the wake of the recalls or who own vehicles ineligible for the override system.

The huge payout will "sting" Toyota, but it will also allow the Japanese giant to "leave these troubles behind and move forward in the new year", said Michelle Krebs, an analyst with automotive site Edmunds.com.

Once lauded for its safety standards, Toyota has been forced into damage control mode in recent years after recalling millions of vehicles due to a series of serious de-

fects.

The firm's biggest domestic rivals, Nissan and Honda, have also issued huge recalls over their own safety and quality problems.

Earlier this year Toyota added two models to the 2009-2010 recalls launched after it was discovered that floor mats were trapping the accelerator pedal.

The settlement, which was filed in a California federal court Wednesday, must still be approved by a judge.

Toyota said it would take a \$1.1 billion charge to cover the estimated costs of the settlement and two other cases.

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BMW says hit record sales in 2012**BMW M6 Gran Coupe**

FRANKFURT (AFP) - German top-of-the-range carmaker BMW sold a record 1.8 million vehicles in 2012, chief financial officer Friedrich Eichiner said in a newspaper interview Thursday.

"One of our goals for 2012 was to increase unit sales and achieve a new deliveries record. With 1.8 million vehicles, we've done that," Eichiner told the Die Welt daily.

Earlier this month, Eichiner had said that BMW was "on target" for reaching a new sales record following buoyant sales in November.

In November, BMW's worldwide sales rose by about 20 percent to more than 170,000 vehicles.

In the 11 months to November, vehicle sales so far this

year reached about 1.66 million, an increase of some 10 percent compared with the same period last year.

The carmaker's aim was to lift sales again next year, Eichiner told Die Welt.

"The big question is whether the markets will allow it," he said, cautioning that BMW would see "stagnation at best" in Europe.

"The United States, on the other hand, will offer recovery opportunities, with the overall market there projected to grow by 5.0 percent and the premium segment even stronger," Eichiner said.

"In addition, we've built up a strong position in medium-sized markets such as Australia, Russia, Korea and Turkey. And these markets are continuing to grow," he said.

Ford to invest \$773 mn in US, create 2,350 jobs

CHICAGO (AFP) - US auto giant Ford said Thursday it will invest \$773 million to expand factories across its home state of Michigan, generating 2,350 new jobs, part of a plan to add 12,000 jobs by 2015.

The investment will help save an additional 3,240 jobs, it said.

"Even as we wrap up an incredibly busy year of capacity expansions and product launches, we are continuing to look to the future," Jim

Oil prices decline on 'fiscal cliff' deal doubts

NEW YORK (AFP) - Oil prices declined Thursday amid doubts that an 11th-hour deal on the "fiscal cliff" crisis could be reached by a rapidly approaching end-of-year deadline.

New York's main contract, West Texas Intermediate (WTI) for February delivery, slipped 11 cents to settle at \$90.87 a barrel.

Brent North Sea crude for February delivery dipped 27 cents to \$110.80 a barrel in London trade.

With the clock ticking, the White House and Republican lawmakers have yet to reach a deal to keep the United States

from falling off the so-called fiscal cliff, a combination of steep tax hikes and drastic spending cuts set to kick in next month.

President Barack Obama cut short his family Christmas break in Hawaii to return to Washington in a last-ditch attempt at reaching a compromise.

But the situation remained tense, with Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, a Democrat, saying Thursday "it looks like" the US economy will hurtle over the fiscal cliff because House Speaker John Boehner and Republican Minority Leader Mitch Mc-

Connell were stalling.

Crude oil prices were "being taken down on what appears to be the growing eventuality that the US is going to go over the fiscal cliff," said analyst John Kilduff of Again Capital.

There was "no doubt that the tax hikes and the spending cuts that will roll automatically will be a real drag on the economy for us," he added.

Experts warn that going over the "fiscal cliff" could take the United States back into recession. And that could hurt oil demand in the world's biggest consumer of crude.

Worst of the euro crisis 'behind us', says German FM

BERLIN (AFP) - German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble said he believes the embattled eurozone is already past the peak of its three-year-long debt crisis, citing positive developments in Greece and France.

In an interview with mass-circulation Bild to appear in Friday's edition, Schaeuble said: "I think the worst is behind us."

"The government in Athens knows that it must not overburden other eurozone mem-

ber states. Therefore it is pressing ahead with reforms," he said in the pre-released interview.

He also expressed optimism about the pace of reform in fellow eurozone powerhouse France, saying Paris "was well aware that every country must constantly carry out reforms in order to stay competitive."

Schaeuble, 70, appeared more optimistic on what lies ahead for the eurozone than Chancellor Angela Merkel who has steadfastly refused to sound the all-clear.

Speaking after the EU picked up its Nobel Peace Prize earlier this month, Merkel said she could not "completely" declare the crisis

over, describing herself as a "prudent optimist."

In contrast, French President Francois Hollande has repeatedly said the eurozone crisis, which has at times threatened the very existence of the 17-country currency union, was past.

Turning to the German economy, the bloc's largest, Schaeuble said he was counting on "decent" growth next year, driven by trade with the United States and Asia.

"The situation is better than expected because of stronger trade with the US and Asia, among other things. The German economy will therefore grow at a decent rate in 2013," Schaeuble said.

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Tetreault, Ford vice president of North America Manufacturing, said in a statement.

"These investments, many of which are already under way, will ensure our southeast Michigan manufacturing facilities can support our aggressive growth plans."

The Dearborn-based manufacturer posted its best November since 2005, as sales rose six percent to 177,673 vehicles. The results were driven by strong demand for its small cars, which posted their best November in 12 years.

Ford employs some 172,000 people and maintains 65 plants worldwide.



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Finance

Greece says needs 27.5 bn euros to recapitalise 4 biggest banks

ATHENS (AFP) - Greece's four biggest banks need 27.5 billion euros (\$36.4 billion) in recapitalisation funds by the end of April, the national central bank said in a report released Thursday.

"Capital needs for all Greek commercial banks were estimated in May 2012 at 40.5 billion euros, of which the 27.5 billion euros corresponded to the four core banks," it said.

The four banks, identified as the National Bank of Greece (NBG), Alpha, Eurobank, and Piraeus, will receive support from the state because they are considered crucial to the national banking sector.

A dozen smaller banks are to be recapitalised with private funds, also by the end of April, the national bank said.

Its assessment of the bank's recapitalisation needs over the 2012-2014 period was "conservative" it said. A key factor behind the needs was a restructuring of Greece's sovereign debt, it said, which hit Greek banks hard because they held large amounts of sovereign bonds.

The banks were also ex-

pected to suffer losses on both domestic and international loans.

According to the central bank, the main objective of its "comprehensive banking sector strategy" is to secure a well-capitalised and viable banking sector."

Greece's main banks had been expected to receive 50 billion euros overall to restore their capital after taking part in a sovereign debt write-down of more than 100 billion euros in March, and a subsequent debt buy-back earlier this month.

European leaders have decided meanwhile to unblock 49.1 billion euros from Greece's outstanding financial assistance package by early next year in return for a new austerity deal in Athens.

Of that amount, around 16 billion euros is earmarked for aid to Greek banks, on top of 18 billion already granted in May.

The ratings agency Standard and Poor's has given Greece's sovereign debt a six-point grade increase, while the European Central Bank has said it would again accept Greek bonds as collateral for central bank loans.



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Facts on the US fiscal cliff, debt ceiling showdowns

WASHINGTON (AFP) - The "fiscal cliff" is a combination of dramatic spending cuts and tax increases mandated to take effect beginning in January if President Barack Obama and Republicans cannot bridge their differences on how best to reduce the nation's budget deficit and debt.

To add to a drama that could reverse the slow US recovery and impact the global economy, the United States is also about to reach its borrowing limit so Congress will also be asked to raise the government's debt ceiling.

WHAT IS THE FISCAL CLIFF?
The Budget Control Act of 2011 codified in law a grudging political compromise forcing the government to slash spending by \$1.2 trillion over 10 years from January 1, 2013.

Next year's cuts, called "sequestration," would be about \$109 billion.

Also on that date, a package of tax reductions and an extension of unemployment benefits will expire, meaning taxes will rise significantly for most Americans.

WHY WILL THIS HAPPEN?

Democrats and Republicans have long been deadlocked over whether to address a \$1 trillion-plus annual budget gap with higher taxes or lower spending.

The Budget Control Act was a poison-pill deal designed to force them to find a less austere compromise, but political wrangling and dysfunction meant no deal was done, and the deadline is now looming.

WHAT HAPPENS IF THE CLIFF IS NOT AVOIDED

Together, higher taxes and lowered spending could slice the \$1.1 trillion deficit racked up in fiscal 2012 (ended Sep-

tember 30) by almost \$500 billion next year, according to the Congressional Budget Office, vastly improving the government's financial picture.

But the CBO estimates the shock treatment would send the country back to recession and push the unemployment rate to 9.1 percent.

Deep cuts would come to both defense and non-defense spending. Government suppliers and contractors would lose business, and temporary furloughs could be in store for tens of thousands of federal employees.

Taxes and automatic paycheck deductions would increase for most Americans, reducing the cash they have for spending, and taxes on capital gains and dividends would rise, hitting investors.

WHAT IS THE DEBT CEILING?

The US government will hit its statutory \$16.39 trillion debt limit on Monday, according to Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner.

The limit is set by Congress, and if it is not raised, the United States will not be able to borrow any more money and would, in theory, be forced to slash spending to make ends meet.

Possible, but desperate, remedies would include halting pay to the military, retirement health benefits, social security, and failing to pay

government debts.

WILL THE US DEFAULT ON ITS DEBT?

Not immediately. The Treasury has various extraordinary measures in its armory, including halting the issuance of securities to state and local governments, which could buy about two months of leeway.

WHAT WOULD A DEFAULT MEAN?

No one is sure: the dollar, and Treasury bonds, are the primary currency of global finance, and holders do not really have any alternatives. And most believe that eventually the US government would make good on its debts. However, the country's credit rating could be further downgraded, likely pushing up its borrowing costs over the medium term and possibly diminishing the dollar's cachet in world finance.

WHAT WILL CONGRESS DO?

Eventually, Congress is likely to raise the debt ceiling but Republicans who run the House of Representatives will use the showdown as leverage to demand spending cuts from Obama in return. It is uncertain how high the raised borrowing limit will be, and in any case any resolution will likely trigger a new confrontation between Obama and Republicans the next time around.



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New Brickell Bay Sand Beach lounge offers a refreshing change both day and night!



The holidays are upon us, which mean festive times for Aruba, but also busy beaches with crowded eateries and often very long waits just to sit down and get a bite to eat. Aruba's newest lounge, Brickell Bay Sand Beach, in Palm Beach, created quite a stir with its recent opening, revealing a chic, unique environment that has strongly

attracted island fashionistas as a relaxed, elegant place to while away the evening hours. Sand Beach also provides a very interesting lunch menu in an ambiance that makes you feel as if you are still stretched

out on the beach, but with a distinctly more tranquil and appealing surroundings, particularly these end of the year days.

A very interesting and reasonable menu features lunch alternatives such as a 6 oz Rock Lobster Tail "Sandwich" on garlic toast with gourmet fries for only \$17, aside from favorite

lunch bar fare. If the frenetic crowds at the beach bars and the demands on the wait help are not quite providing that tranquil setting you are seeking from your Aruban sojourn, you just might want to check it out.

Lunch also includes use of their very appealing pool deck and they offer the latest craze, beach tennis. It is a very interesting alternative, away from the crowds, but still with the feeling of being on the beach or around the pool. It also has an arcade of interesting shops, a mini-market, and the best stocked hookah store on the island.

The new eatery/nightclub is still basically a night spot, and features several attractive specials, including a nightly 2-for-1 happy hours from 5:00 to 7:00 PM which includes frozen drinks and premium brands. There is great entertainment without a cover charge. This Sunday they will feature one of the island's most popular and dynamic entertainers of the last decade,



Marisela and the Aquarius Band, back on Aruba for a limited engagement. Marisela will be heating up Palm Beach for a very cool night at the Sandbar on Sunday, December 23 from 6:00 to 9:00 PM. This is a performer known for "bringing down the house," so don't



Beautiful in Aruba

Hand-carved in a Neo-Gothic style is the beautiful oak altar at the Santa Anna Church in Noord (originally built in 1776). The alter was designed and built in 1870 by Hendrik van der Geld. Originally the altar was in a church in Scheveningen, Netherlands. When the church was renovated in 1928, the parish priest donated the alter, the communion rail and pulpit to the Netherlands Antilles mission which sent it to St. Anna.



US paper draws fire after publishing gun database

NEW YORK (AFP) - A New York newspaper has sparked outrage by publishing a detailed map with thousands of names and addresses of gun permit holders.

The publication came amid a heated debate over gun control revived after the Connecticut massacre and drew intense criticism on social media outlets from gun owners, who called it a violation of privacy.

The Journal News in New York state's Westchester County obtained the publicly available information from county clerks and published it earlier this week in an interactive map alongside an article entitled "The Gun Owner Next Door."

The paper obtained the names and addresses of more than 33,000 permit holders in two counties, though it said that more than 13,000 had no activity in the last five years, and could belong to people who moved or passed away.

It said it was awaiting information on 11,000 permit-holders from a third county.

The newspaper defended the publication, saying the information was legally obtained through a Freedom of Information Act request and that its readers had a right to know whether their neighbors owned firearms.

The newspaper's Facebook page drew hundreds of com-

ments, positive and negative, with several irate users publishing the home addresses, phone numbers and email addresses of the daily's publisher and editors.

"Don't you idiots realize you have just classified the law-abiding gun-owning citizen with sex offenders who have been released from prison?" wrote one user, identified as Sheila Gray.



5 Burgers Aruba: Now your best breakfast bargain!



--A favorite stop for a great burger for lunch or dinner has just expanded their hours and menu to offer some of the best breakfast bargains to be found in Palm Beach. Owners Aaron and Rosie Walisever are living their dream: a home on paradise while welcoming all and sundry to their proud undertaking, 5 Burgers Aruba. The couple's fanatical dedication to giving their customers what they really want has resulted in a unique menu from an inter-

nationally known franchise with a "5", which now includes breakfast.

"You never get a second chance to make a first impression," believes Aaron. Upon entering 5 Burgers Aruba in The Village Mall in Palm Beach, one is struck by utterly spotless surroundings and a smiling, friendly, attentive service crew. Of course, the main item on the menu is burgers-the way they were meant to be, thick and juicy,

made fresh daily and 100% pure beef, the kind that made the hamburger a traditional American treat.

However, beginning at 7 a.m., patrons can now order 2 eggs any style, (omelets with 3 fillings are \$7.99) toast and coffee with unlimited refills for the special introductory price of only \$4.49, (\$5.48, with bacon) or All-you-can-eat pancakes, for \$6.99, again, with free refills on fresh coffee. Breakfast is served until 11 a.m. Famous for their fries made from fresh potatoes, Aaron has been working for months on devising the most irresistible home fries recipe, chunky and tender with skins still on; after much testing and tasting, he got the thumbs up from his harshest critic, Rosie; so this is another treat you have to try.

A glance at their burger menu will certainly tempt you to return for lunch or dinner, to sample their famous specialty items such as the Gouda,



Farmer's or Man Burger (almost 12 ounces of choice beef), and a Western Burger with Aarons' secret-recipe crispy onion rings. All of these can be personalized with an incredible array of toppings, (mushrooms, jala-peño peppers, bacon, cheese, lettuce, tomato...whatever, the list goes on) at absolutely no extra cost.

5 Burger portions are ENORMOUS! Aaron suggests that even their small serving of

fries is enough to be shared by two. He was very amused to watch a famous French chef demonstrating the best way to make fried potatoes on a gourmet cooking show and could only comment "He stole my recipe!"

Try them the English way-with vinegar, and you'll wonder how you ever ate fries without it. This same 5-star chef also swears by Gouda as the best topping for the ideal gourmet cheeseburger.

5 Burgers is now open early until 10-ish at night; delivery is available to both the high-rise and low-rise hotel and beach district at now extra cost for orders over \$50. Enjoy a great lunch without ever leaving the beach by calling 586-3904. However, we suggest you stop by and enjoy their authentic, heartfelt hospitality; it is not unusual for either owner to sit and chat, sharing their knowledge of the island while making sure patrons are happy with their meal.

Gold Coast Aruba: This is the time to invest

-- Management of Gold Coast Aruba, the island's newest and most innovative gated community, reports that sales have been very good and encouraging as the global economy recovers and people looking to purchase vacation homes have found that Gold Coast is an outstanding investment value. Director of Sales, Fito Croes has noticed a surprising percentage of owners in reality do not spend a great amount of time personally to use the villas or town homes they purchase, but are taking advantage of Gold Coast's rental services to turn their investment into ready income.

"The greater portion of home owners are using their "home away from home" in Aruba to escape the winter months, or spend holidays with the family on the island," he remarked, "but I am gratified by how many are buying because they felt secure with real estate investment on Aruba. They really study the history and economy of the island and are impressed with the political stability and continually increasing value of prime locations. Gold Coast is in the heart of Malmok, considered Aruba's most exclusive community where the value of properties has only increased over time. It is only minutes to the best beaches and all the action, and yet offers a quiet and secluded getaway; we are very pleased by



the response to our concept."

Fito, with his sister Mayrin and brother Rudy operate Cas Bon, which has been constructing homes and building developments for all budgets for nearly twenty years. "Gold Coast Aruba is the jewel in our crown," observes Fito. "We were very excited about this project and the scope of actual and planned facilities and amenities. We have spoken to countless island visitors to find out what they would really want in a permanent residence on Aruba, and took from there."

Input from frequent vacationers who have dreamed of their own home in Aruba contributed to the realization of Gold Coast Aruba which when complete will be a community

of 260 town homes, villas and condominiums with a stunning clubhouse complemented by two additional community pool areas. The Clubhouse is about to start construction and will offer to the community homeowners and visitors 2 tennis courts, full service spa and fitness center as well as a stunning pool area and is expected to be complete by early 2013. It will also house a restaurant and mini-market.

Owners who purchased upon the groundbreaking only a few short years ago, are already enjoying a nearly 50% appreciation on their investment, particularly those taking advantage of the on site management's rental services program. There is always a great demand for Aruba and facil-

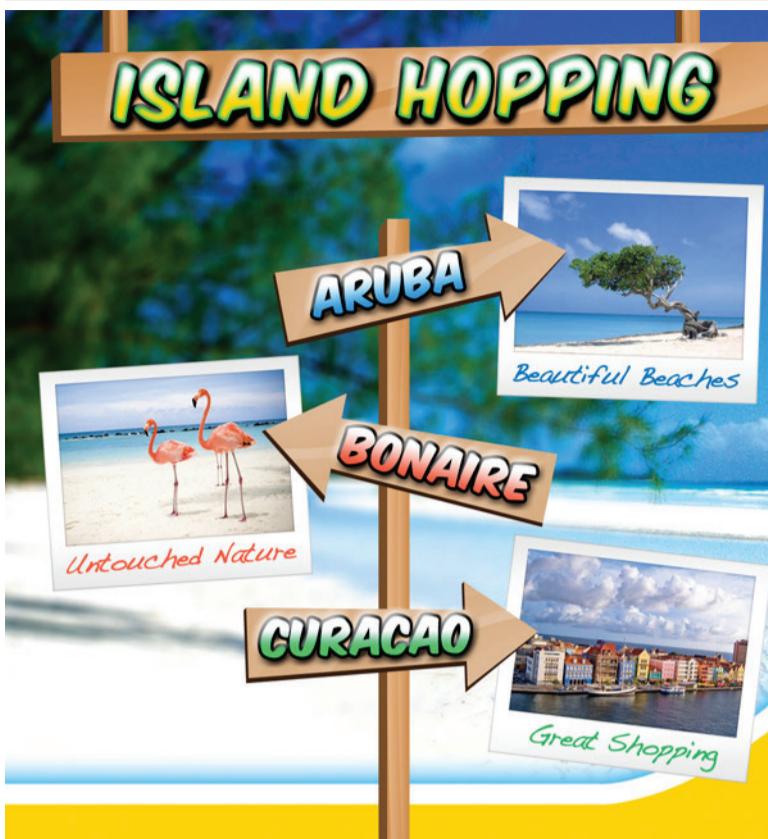
ties such as those at Gold Coast, make it easy for some owners to see a valuable return on their investment.

The design of the residences and public areas is open, airy and spacious, taking full advantage of the island environment, with quality construction and finishing available. Partnering with two of Aruba's top providers of kitchens and bathrooms enables developers to offer custom options allowing buyers to individualize their homes. An elegant and chic furniture package is available or island designers will assist owners in finishing the décor to their specific tastes.

There are many aspects to purchasing property; not the

least is the future value of the investment. To further enhance this, Gold Coast management have inaugurated a number of in-house services and have recently become affiliated Interval International, the world's largest network of vacation ownership properties which provides an unlimited international pool of investors to tap for ownership and rental prospects. Property exchange for a vacation in another destination is also available through the Interval International affiliation. Gold Coast's own rental services have also proven highly successful in assisting owners in renting their villas; 24-hour security and maintenance services also tip the scales when it is time to make a decision. Aside from all this, housekeeping, child care, catering services, car rental through its partnership with AVIS car rental are also available as well as pre-shopping services so cupboards and refrigerators are stocked upon arrival, which can also be arranged through their property management department. Personnel are also available to assist in arranging restaurant reservations and island activities.

Visit their website: www.goldcoastaruba.com for more details and availability or call 586-2200 to arrange a personal tour.




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SPORTS

Yachting: New record as Wild Oats XI wins Sydney to Hobart



HOBART (AFP) - Supermaxi Wild Oats XI took line honours ahead of Ragamuffin-Loyal in Australia's Sydney to Hobart ocean yacht race Friday in record-breaking time.

Onlookers cheered at Hobart's Constitution dock as the race favourite crossed the line in one day, 18 hours, 23 minutes and 12 seconds for its sixth victory in the prestigious 628 nautical mile bluewater classic.

"It was close, we only just made it but it's a great result for the whole team," skipper Mark Richards told Channel Seven minutes after crossing the finish line. Ragamuffin-Loyal, which won last year, was still 50 nautical miles adrift in second and its time could be affected by an international jury hearing after it jumped the start in Sydney.

The previous record was one day, 18 hours, 40 minutes and 10 seconds, set in 2005, also by Wild Oats, and Richards had his 100-foot yacht well ahead of that pace late Thursday as they powered

down Tasmania's east coast.

But a north-easterly breeze gave way to a weaker westerly that dramatically slowed her down and it was touch and go as the yacht sailed up Hobart's Derwent River.

Wild Oats XI led the 76-vessel fleet from the starting gun in Sydney Harbour on Wednesday in a famously unforgiving race which takes crews across the notorious Bass Strait.

Catastrophic conditions claimed six lives and sank five yachts in 1998, and vessels are routinely unable to complete the race. There have so far only been two retirements this year -- Living Doll and Primitive Cool.

This year's event was marred by the controversial expulsion of supermaxi Wild Thing, the 2003 line honours winner which was among the top three race favourites.

Officials banned it just three hours before the start, citing incomplete documentation of major modifications which extended the vessel to 100 feet.

Football: Drogba heads Ivory Coast's Nations Cup squad



ABIDJAN (AFP) - Ivory Coast superstar Didier Drogba headed coach Sabri Lamouchi's 23-player Africa Cup of Nations squad unveiled here on Thursday.

The China-based striker is hoping to lead his country to the title in South Africa after missing out on penalties to Zambia in Gabon in the 2012 edition.

Manchester City's Toure brothers Kolo and Yaya, the African Player of the Year, were among half a dozen players called up from the English Premier League.

The only non-foreign based name on Lamouchi's list was goalkeeper Ali Badra.



Only six of the squad for the January 19-February 10 tournament did not figure at the 2012 Nations Cup.

Ivory Coast are preparing for the competition with a January 6-16 training camp in Abu Dhabi, with a friendly pencilled in against Egypt, who failed to qualify, on January 14.

"I've selected these 23 players to perform good work in Abu Dhabi and I hope that they will all be available to go the Nations Cup," said the team's French coach.

In South Africa, the Ivoirians are drawn in Group D with Algeria, Tunisia and Togo.

De la Hoya's Golden Boy inks Ogogo

LOS ANGELES (AFP) - Oscar de la Hoya's Golden Boy Promotions has signed 2012 Olympic bronze medallist Anthony Ogogo and expects the British middleweight to make his pro ring debut in early 2013.

"Anthony Ogogo has everything you look for in a boxer," said Richard Schaefer, chief executive of Golden Boy Promotions.

"He can fight, he has style and charisma and he has amazing crossover potential. I have no doubt that Anthony has the skills in the ring and the personality outside of it to make him a global boxing star."

In a statement released in Los Angeles, Golden Boy officials said they were pleased to add another British boxer to their stable, after working with such British fighters as Amir Khan, Ricky Hatton and David Haye.

"To represent my country at a home Games was an incredible experience and the bronze medal I won will always be close to my heart," Ogogo said in the statement.

"Following the Olympics I've been looking to the future and considering a number of options, and feel that the time is now right to turn professional with Golden Boy."

Ogogo beat Ukrainian world champion Levgen Khytov in the last 16 en route to the final four at the London Games.

But he settled for bronze after falling 16-9 in the semi-finals to Brazil's Esquiva Falcao.

Ogogo had endured an emotional few months after his mother Teresa suffered a brain haemorrhage.

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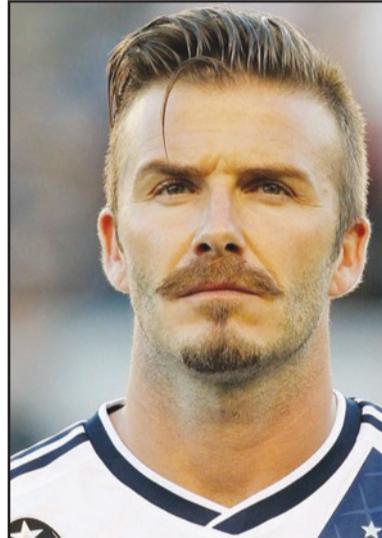
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Football: Beckham considering several offers

LONDON (AFP) - David Beckham insists he has no intention of rushing into his next move as the former Manchester United star considers several offers from teams across the world.

Beckham left LA Galaxy earlier this month at the end of his contract after helping the California side win the MLS Cup and is now looking for the right option for what will likely be the last club of his illustrious career.

The 37-year-old former Real Madrid midfielder, who spent five years in LA, has been linked with QPR in England and Monaco in France, as well as teams from



China and Australia.

A spokesman for Beckham said the former England captain plans to weigh up his options over the holiday period and isn't concerned about coming to a quick decision.

"There are a number of se-

rious proposals on the table from a host of clubs across the world," the spokesperson said.

"David is no hurry to make a decision, the key is making the right one as he has always done successfully in his career.

"It's early days in the process. David is enjoying spending quality time with his family over the holidays."

It is believed reports in France that Beckham has priced himself out of a move to Monaco are premature.

Monaco, currently second in Ligue 2, are coached by former Chelsea manager Claudio Ranieri, who has previously stated his interest in bringing Beckham to the club and is backed by wealthy Russian owner Dimitri Rybolovlev.

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Johnson sacked as Nets coach



NEW YORK2 (AFP) - The Brooklyn Nets on Thursday sacked Avery Johnson as head coach, just a day after his side slipped to a 108-93 defeat to Milwaukee, the club's general manager Billy King announced. Johnson was named head coach of the Nets on June 15, 2010 and in over two seasons he compiled a record of 60-116. The Nets are 14-14 this season but have lost 10 of their last 13 matches. "The Nets ownership would like to express thanks to Avery for his efforts and to wish him every success in the future," said Brooklyn Nets principal owner Mikhail Prokhorov.

Seahawks' Sherman wins doping appeal



NEW YORK (AFP) - Seattle Seahawks cornerback Richard Sherman said Thursday he has won his appeal and avoided a threatened four-game ban for violating the NFL's anti-doping policy.

Sherman, who went to the league offices in New York for the appeal last week, said on Twitter Thursday that he had won his case. He'll be eligible to play for Seattle during the playoffs.

"Thank you @nfl for upholding the truth," Sherman tweeted.

Sherman had steadfastly denied taking performance enhancing drugs since NFL.com and other US media reported in late November that he and

fellow Seahawks cornerback Brandon Browner had both tested positive for the prohibited stimulant Adderall.

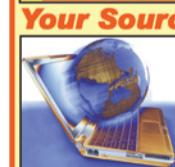
Browner dropped his appeal earlier this month and began his four-game suspension, which will end after Sunday's regular-season finale against St. Louis.

The Seahawks will therefore have both of their starting cornerbacks available when the post-season begins.

The Seahawks clinched a playoff berth with a 42-13 rout of San Francisco 49ers last week.

In his appeal, Sherman argued that a faulty collection procedure had led to contamination of his urine sample.

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NBA: Nuggets halt streaking Lakers, Hawks hold on for double-overtime win over Pistons



Atlanta Hawks small forward Josh Smith (5) scores

DENVER (AFP) - Corey Brewer came off the bench and drained six three-pointers Wednesday as the Denver Nuggets defeated Los Angeles

victory over the New York Knicks in Los Angeles on Tuesday.

Dwight Howard scored 12

les 126-114 and snapped the Lakers' NBA winning streak at five games.

Brewer led the Nuggets with 27 points. Kenneth Faried added 21 points and 15 rebounds and Ty Lawson chipped in 17 points and 14 assists for the Nuggets, who bounced back from a 112-100 Christmas Day loss to the Los Angeles Clippers.

To do so, the Nuggets had to overcome 40 points from Lakers superstar Kobe Bryant.

Pau Gasol added 19 points for the Lakers -- who were coming off a 100-94 victory over the New York Knicks in Los Angeles on Tuesday.

Dwight Howard scored 12

points and grabbed seven rebounds for the Lakers before he was ejected in the third quarter when he was whistled for a flagrant foul after making contact with the head of a driving Faried.

Leading by just one point early in the second half, Denver used a 14-2 scoring run to establish a double-digit lead.

Faried's three-point play sparked the surge, and Danilo Gallinari capped it with a three-pointer that made it 73-60 with 7:51 remaining in the third quarter.

Gallinari finished the game with 19 points and Andre Iguodala added 17 points, 11 rebounds, seven assists and three steals for Denver.

The Lakers answered with a 12-5 run to trim the deficit to six points, but Howard's ejection inspired Denver to a 6-0 spurt.

The Lakers pulled within four points late in the third, but Denver scored the final five points of the period -- including Brewer's three-pointer as the quarter ended -- to take a 96-87 lead into

the fourth.

Brewer drained another three-pointer early in the fourth to stretch Denver's lead to 14 points, and the Lakers didn't get closer than seven the rest of the way as Denver posted their seventh straight win at home.

Lakers coach Mike D'Antoni was reluctant to call the defeat a setback for a team that had point guard Steve Nash back for just the third game since he missed 24 contests with a broken leg.

But Gasol, who was sidelined himself for several games with tendinitis in his knees, admitted the loss was "a little bit of a setback" for a Lakers team that had appeared to be rounding into form after the slow start to the season that lead to the departure of former coach Mike Brown.

Josh Smith in Atlanta scored 31 points and Al Horford added 22 Wednesday as the Atlanta Hawks held on for a 126-119 double-overtime NBA victory over the Detroit Pistons.

Smith added 10 rebounds,

six assists and two blocked shots and Horford grabbed 10 rebounds for the Hawks, who squandered a 22-point fourth-quarter lead before managing to win their second straight.

Lou Williams added 18 points with eight rebounds and seven assists and Jeff Teague scored 17 points for Atlanta, who overcame 31 points from Detroit reserve Will Bynum.

In the first overtime period, both teams struggled offensively. Detroit edged ahead 108-104 with 1:40 remaining. Horford made a layup to cut the gap to two points, and Teague made two free throws to tie it up at 108-108 and from there they went to the second overtime.

The Hawks used a 9-4 scoring run to take a 117-112 lead but a Bynum basket trimmed the deficit to 117-114.

Kyle Korver then drained a three-pointer with 1:40 remaining to stretch the Hawks' lead to 120-114. Williams' jump shot gave the Hawks an eight-point lead and they held on for the win.

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